

VZCZCXR07071
PP RUEHNEH
DE RUEHAA #0567/01 1251014
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 051014Z MAY 09ZDF
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2766
INFO RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5158
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2902
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2767
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3402
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0984
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3523
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000567

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EIND ETRD SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN REVISES LAW ON FOOD QUALITY AND TIGHTENS BABY FOOD REGULATIONS

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On April 28, the official newspaper, "Neytralniy Turkmenistan," published two revised laws that impose new measures to ensure the safety of baby food and other food products and that outline the government's responsibilities to assure that imported foods, in particular, are safe for consumption. While the laws are generally restrictive regarding new challenges such as genetically-modified foods and food additives, and ban the marketing of infant formulas to expectant mothers, they also reflect some relaxation of restrictions on the importation of foods with a limited shelf life. The latter change could result in more imported foods making it through customs inspection and into the Turkmenistan market. END SUMMARY.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH OVERSEES FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY

¶2. (U) The newly-revised law on food product quality and safety still contains provisions on product certification, labeling, and importation, and continues its ban on the importation of food products made of genetically-modified contents. For the first time, the new law also allows the importation of vitamin and herbal supplements.

¶3. (U) The revised law states that herbal and vitamin supplements can be imported after the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Service of the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry (MOHMI) approve and register them in Turkmenistan, assuming that health authorities in the country of origin have approved their use. The MOHMI is tasked with monitoring the use of supplements, and can restrict or ban their importation if new scientific information surfaces regarding their potential negative side effects. The MOHMI can restrict the importation of food products that contain unauthorized supplements or more than three artificial colors.

¶4. (SBU) The new law also reduces the minimum shelf life requirement with regard to food imports. From now on, food products cannot be imported if they have less than 50 percent of their shelf life, starting from their production dates, when they reach Turkmenistan. (NOTE: Shelf life is a key problem in Turkmenistan, where expired products of every kind are a common occurrence, and

transportation from foreign factory to the Turkmen market can take months. END NOTE.)

RESTRICTING THE MARKETING OF BABY FORMULAS

¶5. (U) A new law that covers baby food safety and that lays down international standards for promoting breastfeeding was also adopted in late April. It establishes a national policy through promotion, protection and advertisement of breastfeeding, and also sets quality and safety standards for infant formula.

¶6. (U) MOHMI has been made responsible for promoting breastfeeding by training nurses and educating new mothers. The law does not allow health specialists to release the names and addresses of pregnant and breastfeeding women to those seeking to market infant formulas. The law forbids all healthcare institutions --with the exception of orphanages -- from accepting baby food donations from entities seeking to market baby food. The law also prohibits baby food manufacturers and distributors from advertising infant formulas to health care providers that would discourage breastfeeding, without approval from the MOHMI.

¶7. (U) The law contains specific provisions on baby food packaging, labeling and sale. A warning must be on the package that states that a formula should be used only if a doctor prescribes it. Infant formula is to be sold only in special baby food stores or pharmacies that meet specific sanitary requirements. Infant formula labels must be written in Turkmen and/or Russian and foreign languages, and must contain information on its origin, exporter, importer, shelf life, date of origin and packaging. The law even introduced regulations regarding infant pacifiers. A pacifier can only be sold if the package reads, "Warning: Use of a pacifier will do harm to breast feeding."

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¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Local food importers view the reduction in remaining shelf life from 70 percent to 50 percent as a positive change, due to the time it takes to get food products from foreign factory to the Turkmen market. Local consumers hope that this change will result in a wider variety of food imports, which could potentially lead to a decrease in food prices. Allowing the importation of supplements is also a welcome change. A friend of a local Pol/Econ staffer, who in the past used supplements made in Israel to stimulate her immune system, said that she had to stop taking them in January of 2004, because the previous version of the law banned the importation of supplements. The new law should open the door for herbal and vitamin supplements to re-enter the Turkmen market. END COMMENT.

MILES